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ABSTRACT

Two meanings of the word "discourse" are distinguished. The first treats discourse as conversation (D1), and the other refers to different ways of understanding (D2). Rather than seeing the two kinds of discourse as different, they are seen as having an important connection, particularly in classroom communication. Examples are drawn from the literature of classroom interaction. It is argued that critical discourse analysis should be applied not only to the teacher's instructional discourse (D2), but also to his various forms of D1, including how systems of meaning are approached, responded to, talked about, and resisted: i.e., the contact zones in which meanings are made and unmade. Contains 13 references. (MSE)

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Two Meanings of 'Discourse'

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In my book Classroom Discourse published in 1988, I synthesized the research then available on all aspects of talk in classrooms. In this presentation, I discuss one conceptual change in this area of research over the last ten years.

Ten years ago, I named my book by its topic, classroom *discourse*, and didn't think much about that word choice. At the same time, I was teaching a course with the same name at Harvard. One student, Native Alaskan Martha Demientief, introduced her take-home exam with these words:

> As I began work on this assignment, I thought of the name of the course and thought I had to use the word "discourse." The word felt like an intruder in my mind, displacing my word "talk." I could not organize my thoughts around it. It was like a pebble thrown into a still pond disturbing the smooth water. It makes all the other words in my mind out of sync. When I realized that I was using too much time agonizing over how to write the paper, I saw down and tried to analyze my problem. I realized that in time I will own the word and feel comfortable using it, but until that time my own words were legitimate.... (Cazden, 1992, p 191).

Martha made me think about why I had used the term in a book written primarily for teachers and graduate students, not for fellow researchers. At that time, I decided that 'talk' was an adequate synonym, that the book was simply about sequences of talk in one institutional setting that extend beyond sentence and turn boundaries. I would now give a different answer to today's Marthas.

In an article in the 1994 Applied Linguistics, Alastair Pennycook contrasts the two meanings of discourse I am contrasting here. After recounting an argument with a colleague, Pennycook explains, "From one point of view, we were participants *in the same*

discourse (the same conversation), while from the other we were each taking up positions *in different discourses* (different ways of understanding)" (p. 116). The contrast is between discourse as conversation, which I'll call D1, versus discourse as different ways of understanding, which I'll call D2. One can substitute 'talk' in Pennycook's first D1 meaning:

We were participants in the same *talk*.

But substitution in his second meaning, D2, is impossible:

*We were each taking up positions in different *talks*.

In fact, whenever discourses, in the plural, makes sense, we mean D2, and it is that meaning that was not in my 1988 book and will be in added in the revision.

In his 1996 book, Text and corpus analysis: Computer-assisted studies of language and culture, Michael Stubbs makes that same distinction. More than half-way through the book, he notes that up to that point he has been using 'discourse' to mean simply "naturally occurring instances of language use"; he then goes on to explain—with credit to Foucault, Fairclough, and Lemke--the contrasting meaning that will now be his topic: "Discourse is also used in a very different sense to mean recurrent phrases and conventional ways of talking, which circulate in the social world and which form a constellation of repeated meanings" (158).

Readers may well be thinking, "So what's new? Of course the term has both D1 and D2 meanings." What has become significant to me is that instead of seeing these two ways of conceptualizing 'discourse' as "incommensurable," as Pennycook suggests, analyzing how they come together has become a special challenge. Jay Lemke pioneered such an integrated analysis in his 1990 book, Talking Science. I'll give two other

examples: one from James Wertsch's analysis of a classroom vignette, the other from Hugh Mehan's larger school-based analysis that includes the classroom.

In Voices of the Mind, Wertsch analyses a teacher's response to a kindergarten child's sharing time narrative. Danny brought a piece of lava to school. In the stretch of D1 about the lava, Danny starts in D2 from his life world, answering another child's question about where he got it.

D. From my mom. My mom went to the volcano and got it....I've had it ever since I was...I've always...I've always been, um, taking care of it.
T. [in an instructional D2] Is it rough or smooth?
D. [shifting to her D2] Real rough and it's ...and it's...and its sharp.
T. [after suggesting that D pass it around the class] Is it heavy or light?
D. It's heavy...

When the next child sharer happens to bring a dictionary to show, T uses it to add earth science expertise to her discourse about the lava:

T. Wow. Wait till you hear what this says....It says, "lava is melted rock that comes out of a volcano when it erupts. It is rock formed by lava that has cooled and hardened." So that must have been hot lava that, that came out of the volcano....

D. [ending this D1] And it's...Know what? And it's still...it's still...Look...Shows from where it got...from where it was burned (1991, pp 113-115).

One could go on to ask who's appropriating what in this example. Is the teacher appropriating Danny's object by extracting it from Danny's life world and recontextualizing it into her discourse of instructional earth science? Or, when Danny ends with, "Look! [It] shows ...from where it was burned," with seeming excitement, is he willingly appropriating some of T's D2 to give added significance to his lava? Might he even reinsert that significance into his life world by reporting the sharing time event to his mom after school? Is appropriation occurring in both directions? Whatever the answer to

these questions, I want to emphasize the importance of considering the two D2s that have come into contact in this stretch of D1 during a few moments of Kindergarten airtime.

The second example comes from Mehan's analysis of how, over a series of events, a child comes to be categorized as 'learning disabled." The most complete analysis is in his co-authored book, Handicapping the Handicapped: Decision Making in Students' Careers (1986); theoretically even richer is his more recent chapter in Natural Histories of Discourse (Silverstein & Urban, 1996).

The categorization of fourth-grader Shane takes place through multiple events, multiple stretches of D1, from the teacher's initial referral of Shane for possible "special education" placement on October 10, after only a month of interacting with him in class, to February 2, when a School Appraisal Team meeting is held. Mehan taped the various D1s along the way, and analysed them for the different D2s that participants in various roles brought to the decision meeting, and for how one came to dominate the final decision.

Briefly, according to Mehan, the teacher's D2 is "micro-sociological," temporing her oral report with contingent factors that seemed to influence Shane's behavior in class. The mother's oral report is "historical," recounting changes and even progress in Shane's behavior over time at home. The psychologist speaks with a "technical, quasi-scientific" D2, supported by artefacts of multiple test results. In D1 processes, the psychologist's recommendations were accepted without challenge or question, while the teacher and mother were routinely interrupted with requests for clarification and further information.

Two connections may relate these contrasting referents, D1 and D2, to applied linguistics work by James Gee and Critical Discourse Analysis. James Gee (1990)

distinguishes between "little d" discourse and "big D" discourse. But I am reluctant to extend my D2 construct to be synonymous with all of his big D, in part because I'm mindful of the response of at least one African American educator, Lisa Delpit (1995, 152-166), that Gee's analysis seems to preclude the kind of bi-discoursal competence that she believes possible and demonstrates herself. (Gee answers her briefly in the second edition, 1996 p. 137).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA, eg Fairclough, 1989 and later) should be applied to the teacher's instructional D2, as I have begun elsewhere in an analysis of elementary school students' written reports' (1996), and to the psychologist's D2, as Mehan himself does. But CDA seems too often content to stop with analysis of texts without going on to see how their systems of meanings are taken up, responded to, talked about, resisted, in various D1s, the contact zones in which meanings are made and unmade. Until so taken up, they remain only meaning potentials in marks on page or screen, even more inert than the proverbial tree that falls in the forest when there is no one to hear it. But when so taken up, we can analyze how particular systems of meanings become contextualized in ever-new D1s with ever-new consequences for individual and social life. It is bringing these two referents of the term 'discourse' together that seems to me one of our most challenging tasks.

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